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ABSTRACT

An increasingly important function of high school counselors is advising students about financing their postsecondary education. With substantial increases in the amount of student financial aid funds available from the federal government, state aid programs, and local and other sources, the counselor's role has been significantly affected. This paper outlines several programs instituted at one high school in an effort to disseminate financial aid information to students. These programs include: (1) an early fall assembly for the entire senior class during which the financial aid counselor offers information on financial opportunities and the processes of seeking financial aid; (2) a college night during which a special session on financial aid procedures is conducted; (3) a financial aid workshop in which parents are assisted in the completion of the Parents' Confidential Statement; and (4) the distribution of a 60-page handbook detailing scholarship and loan programs to students seeking a variety of postsecondary options. (Author/HMV)

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Financial Aid Specialist in the Secondary School.

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Cranston High School East
Cranston, Rhode Island

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ABSTRACT

FINANCIAL AID SPECIALIST IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

An increasingly important function of high school counselors is advising students about financing their postsecondary education. With substantial increases in the amount of student financial aid funds available from the federal government, state aid programs, and local and other sources, the counselor's role has been significantly affected.

Cranston High School East for many years had a counselor assigned the responsibility of collecting and disseminating information about financial aid. However, it was felt that the number of students availing themselves of the information should be increased. Additional means of outreach and expansion of the type of services provided was recognized to be needed if the specialist counselor was to be truly effective.

Early in the fall of each new school year, two assemblies are conducted for the senior class. In one, the Director of Guidance presents information on the selection of postsecondary schools and entrance requirements at the various institutions. In the other, the Financial Aid Counselor offers information on financial opportunities and the processes of seeking financial aid; also, he distributes literature pertinent to each individual student's situation. At this time, students are encouraged to seek assistance by requesting individual counseling sessions with the financial aid counselor. In addition, counselors are invited to refer students as questions arise.

In order to provide further information to students and their parents, a college night is held during which representatives from local colleges, business schools, technical schools, and junior colleges speak about the requirements, programs available, and opportunities for acceptance. An integral part of the college is a special session on financial aid procedures. At a later date, a financial aid workshop is conducted with the cooperation of a college financial aid administrator for the purpose of assisting parents in the completion of the Parents' Confidential Statement. The financial aid counselor responds to concerns the parents and students have and advises students about things to do to enhance their chances for obtaining financial assistance.

Since there has been an increase in the number of students coming from disadvantaged families, a close working relationship was established with the welfare department, and community action groups as well as with the Neighborhood Youth Corps counselors. In addition, all postsecondary schools are contacted for information relating to special programs for disadvantaged students, policies on application fee waivers, and general financial aid opportunities.

To reach students, information is disseminated by the financial aid counselor during assemblies, workshops, and at the college night. Visits are also made to particular classes such as Advanced Placement in English and in United States History, and career-oriented clubs. New information is posted in the daily bulletin, in the guidance newsletter, and in the school newspaper. In addition, the results of a survey of the junior class in the spring of 1974 are used in identifying students seeking financial aid assistance, especially as related to specific career goals.

Perhaps the most significant instrument used to assist students and their parents is a sixty-page handbook prepared by the financial aid specialist which gives details about scholarship and loan programs for students seeking a wide variety of postsecondary options. Available to each student, it includes information about scholarship and loan programs offered by civic and educational groups in the city and in the state. Federal programs are also discussed.

In June of each school year, all seniors are given an individual questionnaire prepared by the Guidance Department. A summary of the questionnaire results for the past six years has indicated a very significant increase in the number of different awards and in the total amount of financial aid and scholarship awards.

Model 1

Financial aid specialist in the secondary school devoted full-time to advising students and parents in financial planning for postsecondary educational opportunities.

Identification

Cranston High School East is a comprehensive high school including grades 10 through 12. The total enrollment is approximately 1,900, with a senior class of 650 students. Currently, 17 percent of the graduates attend two-year postsecondary schools, 36 percent of the students go on to four-year colleges, and 6 percent attend other types of postsecondary schools. Cranston High School East is located in a community with a population of 75,000 residents. There is one other senior high school and three junior high schools within the community.

The Importance of Financial Aid Counseling

An increasingly important function of high school counselors is advising students about financing their postsecondary education. With substantial increases in the amount of student financial aid funds available from the federal government, state aid programs, and local and other sources, the counselor's role has been signficantly affected. The counselor expert in financial aid is in a unique position to encourage students to consider a variety of postsecondary educational experiences, since it has been found that educational and vocational decisions are frequently based on financial considerations.

Origin of the Program

The high school for many years had a counselor assigned the responsibility of collecting and disseminating information about financial aid. However, it was felt that the number of students availing themselves of

the information should be increased. Additional means of outreach and an expansion of the type of services provided was recognized to be needed if the specialist counselor was to be truly effective.

Role of the Financial Aid Counselor

An optimistic, concerned attitude on the part of the financial aid counselor is essential to the success of the program. It is imperative that he be well organized and willing to actively search for information. In addition, the counselor must have the ability to establish good rapport with students, parents, counselors, and others involved in the financial aid process.

The financial aid counselor must develop a variety of techniques to disseminate information so that more students will be made aware of the many diversified opportunities. Furthermore, printed materials and visual aids that will be helpful to students, parents, and to other school personnel must be prepared and updated as necessary.

The counselor must be willing to become involved in the financial aid process in the following ways:

1. By attending the financial aid workshops offered by colleges.
2. By seeking advice from college financial aid administrators about need analysis.
3. By answering questions of students, parents, and other counselors about determining financial need.
4. By making presentations before parent groups and civic and fraternal organizations in the community on financial aid resources and procedures.
5. By being of assistance to local groups offering financial aid and scholarship opportunities to the students in the school.

Scope of the Program

Early in the fall of each new school year, two assemblies are conducted for the senior class. In one, the director of guidance presents information on the selection of postsecondary schools and entrance test requirements at the various institutions. In the other, the financial aid counselor offers information on financial aid opportunities and the processes of seeking financial aid; also, he distributes literature pertinent to each individual student's situation. At this time, students are encouraged to seek assistance by requesting an individual counseling session with the financial aid counselor. In addition, counselors are invited to refer students as questions arise.

In order to provide further information to students and their parents, a college night is held during which representatives from local colleges, business schools, technical schools, and junior colleges speak about the requirements, programs available, and opportunities for acceptance. An integral part of the college night is a special session on financial aid procedures. Here again the financial aid counselor has an opportunity to offer assistance and to present any financial aid and scholarship announcements that have been received.

During Education Week in the fall, an Open House is held for the parents of the entire student body. The financial aid counselor is introduced and makes known any additional information or plans for workshops.

At a later date, a financial aid workshop is conducted with the cooperation of a college financial aid administrator for the purpose of assisting parents in the completion of the Parents' Confidential Statement. The financial aid counselor responds to concerns the parents and students have and advises students about things to do to enhance their chances for obtaining financial assistance.

In all of these sessions, the main idea is to reach out to all students planning any type of postsecondary education so they will receive adequate information and encouragement relating to the submission of financial aid applications.

Since there has been an increase in the number of students coming from disadvantaged families, a close working relationship was established with the welfare department and community action groups as well as with the Neighborhood Youth Corps counselors.

Ways and Means of Reaching Out

To reach students, information is disseminated by the financial aid counselor during assemblies, workshops, and at the college night. Visits are also made to particular classes such as Advanced Placement in English and United States History, and career-oriented clubs. New information is posted on the daily bulletin, in the guidance newsletter, and in the school newspaper. In addition, the results of a survey of the junior class in the spring of 1974 are used in identifying students seeking financial aid assistance, especially as related to specific career goals. Perhaps the most significant instrument used to assist the students and their parents is a sixty-page handbook prepared by the financial aid specialist which gives details about scholarship and loan programs for students seeking a wide variety of postsecondary options. Available to each student, it includes information about scholarship and loan programs offered by civic and educational groups in the city and in the state. Federal programs are also discussed.

How the Financial Aid Counselor Keeps Up to Date

The amount of available information on financial aid and scholarships is extensive. One of the most imporant resources is the College Entrance Examination Board, which supplies brief, periodic informational

fliers and such publications as The College Board News, Financial Aid News, and The College Board Review. These, along with publications provided by the American College Testing Program, are studied carefully.

Attendance at College Board workshops, regional meetings, and college-day programs are also necessary for keeping up to date on policies, procedures, and opportunities. This financial aid counselor attended two summer workshops conducted by the College Entrance Examination Board.

A bibliography of books, pamphlets, and policies has been established including specific information that would be helpful to the financial aid counselor, students, or parents. In addition, a file of applications and programs available to high school students has been organized. This file is kept up to date for possible additions and/or deletions.

Perhaps some of the most significant sources of assistance are the contacts made with local college financial aid administrators and directors of scholarship and loan programs. As individual problems or questions arise, the financial aid counselor contacts the appropriate agency.

In addition, all postsecondary schools are contacted for information relating to special programs for disadvantaged students, policies on application fee waivers, and general financial aid opportunities. The high school counselor acts as a liaison between the secondary school and the postsecondary institutions on matters relating to financial aid.

The directors from the postsecondary institutions who are responsible for administering special programs are invited to visit the high school to talk with the financial aid counselor, students, and other interested personnel.

Follow-Up Study

In June of each school year, all seniors are given an individual questionnaire prepared by the guidance department. Information is gathered on each individual's future educational and vocational goals, the postsecondary institution to which he has been accepted, and the amount of financial assistance received. Information is requested relative to receipt of a Rhode Island State Scholarship Award and other gift awards. Items about loans or work study opportunities are not included in the questionnaire.

A summary of the questionnaire results for the past six years is compiled in the following table:

Year	Number of Graduates	R.I. State Scholarships*	Other**
1969	688	$30,350	$37,800
1970	675	20,450	25,300
1971	720	28,000	47,560
1972	669	37,250	71,800
1973	583	18,250	42,698
1974	579	33,900	49,025

*Amount of one year awards--students are eligible for four years.

**Does not include other forms of aid--CWS, NDSL, Basic Grants, or awards received after graduation.

Evaluation of the Program

The concerns about financing postsecondary education are growing each year. Increasingly, students and their parents have been asking counselors for advice on how to meet college expenses. This has increased the uses of the financial aid counselor.

STRENGTHS:

1. Interest, encouragement, and support given by the principal, director of guidance, and other school personnel.

2. Unrestricted permission granted to attend workshops and meetings without a limit on the frequency of involvement.

3. Financial assistance provided to purchase books, pamphlets, supplies, and to attend meetings.

4. Cooperation and assistance have been offered by other counselors in referring students, identifying problems, and in making the program more meaningful.

5. Freedom has been allowed to function independently or in cooperation with counselors and other school staff members.

6. The school clerical staff, especially the secretary assigned to the guidance department, has been very helpful.

7. There has been continued publicity about the financial aid service and the accomplishments of the program.

8. Recent graduates and students from other schools have sought assistance from this counselor.

9. There has been a significant increase in the number of different awards.

10. There has been a significant increase in the total amount of financial aid and scholarship awards.

11. The financial aid counselor has served as a resource person and has participated in regional meetings and workshops.

WEAKNESSES

Although great strides have been made in the services of the financial aid counselor, there are some apparent weaknesses which have limited the effectiveness of those services, as follows:

1. It has not been definitely established in the minds of all school personnel that financial aid counseling is a separate but integral part of the guidance services.

2. While demands for the service seem to be growing, there is not a sufficient understanding among all school personnel about the nature and scope of the program.

3. The time allotted to this service is not commensurate with the re-

sponsibilities of the position.

4. There is no separate budget to purchase necessary materials and supplies.

5. The funds from which the financial aid counselor may request money to attend conferences and workshops are not adequate.

6. Because of other responsibilities, the financial aid counselor does not always find it possible to identify some of the more needy students or to provide direction and assistance needed.

7. There is no provision for follow up studies to determine if the system is working and if any adjustments should be made.

8. The necessary clerical assistance puts a burden on an already overworked staff.

9. Some students who are in need of assistance are not availing themselves of the opportunities and services that could benefit them.